an inquiry should ever have been held is incapable of explanation so long as the allegations made by Mr. Petre to the coroner are regarded as privileged and not divulged. Though pressed to produce this document, the coroner refused to do so, and the public remain ignorant of the reasons which led the Home Secretary to order the exhumation. Mr. Petre's solicitor said that his client was satisfied with the result of the inquiry, but what is to compensate Mr. Smith for this attack upon his reputation, for the annoyance he must have suffered, and for time and money lost? Mr. Smith will have the sympathy of every member of the profession.

INFLUENZA IN THE DOUBRUGHA.

A CORRESPONDENT, writing from Kustendji on the 5th inst., states that influenza is still very prevalent in that part of the world; but the mortality arising from the disease is small, at least so far as his practice is concerned. Lung complications have been severe in some cases—pneumonia, pleuro-pneumonia, and bronchitis in adults, and broncho-pneumonia in children; gastric catarrh also has given much trouble, as well as neuralgia of the facial nerves. For this last symptom he has found the exhibition of a combination of phenacetine, exalgine, and antipyrin, accompanied with aperient treatment, to be beneficial. In aged people heart failure has been rather pronounced, and has been effectually combated by cardiac tonics, stimulants, and a full supply of nutritious diet. The weather in the Doubrugha has been extremely severe.

BRITISH MEDICAL BENEVOLENT FUND.

WE desire to call the earnest attention of the profession at large to the figures laid before the subscribers to the British Medical Benevolent Fund by Sir William Broadbent, their honorary treasurer, at the annual general meeting. An analysis of the income for the past year from all sources shows a lamentable falling-off in the number of subscribers, while the applications from the necessitous for aid have been more numerous than ever. The report of the committee, with their treasurer's statement, is given in another column, and explains, in a manner that we do not attempt to improve upon, the obvious reasons why the charity ought to receive immediate support, and we sincerely trust that this will be the fortunate issue of their words and ours. That such work should be crippled for the want of more general recognition is an occurrence that we deeply deplore.

FATALITY AT A XYLONITE WORKS.

THE fatality which occurred on the premises of the British Xylonite Company on Dec. 29th, 1893, appears to have been due, according to the evidence of experts at the inquest held on Tuesday last, to the dropping of a hot plate of the hydraulic press, which contained the xylonite in course of manufacture, in such a way that a current of inflammable vapour was established, which, finding its way to a gas jet, instantly ignited and set fire to sheets of the finished material lying close by. The "pressman" was therefore overcome by the fumes and suffocated—a conclusion, at any rate, arrived at by the jury. Some of our readers may remember that we undertook some experiments with this very material,[1] which is known also as celluloid, with the view of ascertaining how susceptible to sudden combustion it was under the influence of heat of increasing intensity, as it had been some time previously reported that certain serious risks had been involved through the wearing of articles (buttons, hair-pins and combs) composed of this substance. While our investigations led us to report that celluloid was highly inflammable, yet we had no reason for concluding that it ever proved so spontaneously; at the same time we urged upon manufacturers the desirability of rendering it less inflammable by the incorporation of deterrent materials. It appears that xylonite or celluloid, which is made from especially prepared tissue paper treated with nitric and sulphuric acids, and worked into a dough with camphor and spirits of wine, and subsequently pressed into sheets, is declared by Government experts not to be an explosive. In spite of this pronouncement we agree emphatically with the rider added by the jury—viz., that the manufacture and storage in large quantities of substances such as xylonite, which are specially dangerous and liable to cause fire, should be placed under regulations and supervision with a view to securing protection to the workpeople and the general public, while exposed lights in rooms (here the electric light would be a remedy) where such material is being made up should in all cases be prohibited.

[1] See THE LANCET of March 5th and 26th, 1892.

THE OPIUM COMMISSION.

THE Indian papers contain, as might be expected, a great deal about the proceedings of the Opium Commission in India and the evidence given before it. There has been, of course, much evidence adduced on both sides of the question, but it cannot be concealed that the weight of testimony, so far from being favourable to the anti-opium movement, has been against it. The general feeling seems to be that the case of the anti-opium party has broken down. The general tendency of the evidence is to show that the use of opium in moderation is harmless and, under certain conditions, even distinctly beneficial, and that any attempt to prohibit its use would be unadvisable, and might lead to serious opposition and possible disturbance. It is not denied that the abuse—that is to say, the immoderate use—of opium may, and occasionally does, give rise to evil consequences; but instances of the kind are relatively rare and have been greatly exaggerated. The mass and weight of the evidence are favourable to the soundness and reasonableness of the policy of the Government of India regarding opium. The number of instances in which the drug is immoderately used is insignificant compared with the immoderate use of alcohol in this and other countries, and as regards the prejudicial effects of opium on the races of India, they are not to be compared with the baneful results, moral and physical, of alcohol witnessed elsewhere or as occasionally seen among the natives of Bengal or India itself.

DEATH OF A DISTINGUISHED PHYSICIST.

SCIENCE has sustained severe losses recently through the deaths, in some cases at an early age, of several of its well-known leaders. Notable instances in medicine, chemistry and botany have been recorded in the columns of THE LANCET during the present winter, and now, according to the *Kölnische Zeitung*, physical science has just lost an able investigator in the person of the distinguished physicist Professor Hertz, of Bonn, at the early age of thirty-six. Professor Hertz's investigations dealt exclusively with the relations between light and electricity. In 1865 Professor Clerk Maxwell maintained that light, electricity and magnetism are all affections of the same medium; that light is an electro-magnetic phenomenon and that its laws can be deduced from those of electricity and magnetism. These views were closely studied by Hertz, with the result that he eventually was able to prove experimentally that electric waves, like light waves, are transverse to the line of motion of the wave and that they require a specific time for transmission. In further experiments he showed also that the electric waves followed the ordinary law of reflection. The phenomenon of electric refraction was similarly demonstrated, as was also the existence not only of optical waves of electricity of the well-known minuteness of